

Dea ex Machina

BY ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS WARD

IT was a smoky sou'wester—one of the brilliant and beautiful light winds which precede the gale due on the New England coast in the dying of August or the birth of September.

The catboat careened and labored a good deal, making the course with some difficulty, as if the solitary sailor were unpractised or out of practice; but the expression of the man betrayed no discomfort whatever. Rather it might be said that a species of insane joy possessed him. His muscles were tense with delight; every nerve quivered rapturously. His dignified straw hat floated about in the swash at the bottom of the boat, and his curling gray hair blew boyishly back from his heavily lined forehead. His eyes were two mad dancers; upon his parted lips clung a smile of ecstasy.

"Nothing *can* make a catboat safe!" he muttered, joyously, gulping mouthfuls of dashing salt water between his teeth. "I always used to say so when I used to sail. But then, she doesn't know the difference. Cat or Omarder, it's all the same to her, thank God! Fortunately," he thought, "it's the time for her nap. She won't see."

The town was now well behind him, and the shore approaching rapidly. About the hotel beyond the pier the summer people stirred like figures seen in a fever. A lady in a dory just ahead of him rowed with a strong stroke. She wore a boating-dress of white flannel; her arms were brown and athletic. She glanced at him over her shoulder.

In the amber mist the spire of his church shot up dizzily; the roof of the parsonage showed gray and distant—the southern piazza, where the woodbine would not grow because the winters were so bleak; the row of poplars in his front yard, all bent by the easterlies, like round-shouldered little old men; the windows of his wife's room, and the white curtains—drawn? or parted? It was a

tremendous question. The minister felt the cold drops start on his forehead beneath the splashing spray.

Now the catboat put her nose into the water and began to prance. She keeled heavily. The water ran over the rail like a river. An expression of bliss scarcely less than maudlin settled upon the minister's face.

A partly submerged reef (it was half-tide) ran out ahead of him, like a forefinger with a sharp nail. Everybody knew this reef; none better than he (she had allowed him to row), and he tacked to escape it. As he luffed, a flaw dealt the catboat a vicious box on the ear. She keeled and capsized.

When the minister found himself in the water, his first sensation was one of mortified astonishment that it was so difficult to swim with his rubber boots on. He was a good man, a religious man, a saint in his way, but when he felt himself sinking, a big, natural, human terror of death possessed him.

As the water roared in his ears and crushed his lungs, he uttered two words only.—

"Poor Nelly!"

For twenty years the sweet reasonableness of this most manly man had idealized and sheltered an unreasonable woman. He had performed his share of the pious deeds expected of his holy office; but there were not wanting among his people a few cynics who held that the chief Christian fact of their pastor's career was that he was the husband of his wife.

Now the lady in the dory, being but a summer lady, knew nothing of the natural history of the winter parson, and when her boat came leaping through the smoky sou'wester to the sinking man, and her ear, flue as some beautiful wild animal's, caught, half-asphyxiated as it was, that heartrending, soul-confessing



HIS MUSCLES WERE TENSE WITH DELIGHT

"Poor Nelly!" she thought, "I save a lover worth saving—or having."

Down went her brown, beautiful arms, both of them, into the water. His, as he came up, clutched them with the blind grasp of his mortal emergency. The dory, behaving as a dory should, keeled but held stoutly. With two firm hands, as powerful as his own, the woman swung the man through the water till she brought him astern. He clambered up collectedly, and sat dripping upon one of the thwarts. She took up her oars.

"Madam," said the minister, gravely;—" *moriturus saluto.*"

"*Qui fui moriturus,*" corrected the lady, quickly.

"I defer to your finer—or your fresher—Latin," he responded. "You row an admirable stroke; you have a strong arm, a quick wit, a steady head—in short, an amount of pluck not expected of your sex. I am under obligations—"

"Omit to mention them," interrupted the lady, frowning slightly. "I am accustomed to meeting emergencies; it is part of my business in life. Put your hand in my pocket, please; there is some brandy there. I can't lay down these oars till I get you ashore—the tide is too strong; we shall drift. You will take two swallows," she added, nodding authoritatively at her passenger. "Who is Captain of this boat?" she asked, sharply, seeing that he hesitated. "Obey orders. I tell you!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried the passenger, promptly. The sailor in him came to the relief of the clergyman. As he thrust his dripping hand into the lady's dry, white pocket, and tipped a dainty travelling-flask to his purple lips, his brain whirled with a vision of two human faces providentially absent from this remarkable occasion. One was the countenance of his wife; the other belonged to the president of the parish temperance association.

"There now!" observed the lady, who was rowing with a vigorous, masculine stroke, "you look better. You are not young enough to stand this sort of thing without proper care."

"I'm not old enough to enjoy being told so!" said the minister, with spirit. A woman of the world would not have said that, he thought; and he was quite right in his conclusion.

"Pardon me," said the young lady, with unexpected gentleness; "I am obliged to be so blunt in my business."

She had now brought the dory alongside of the tossing float which lapped the water below the hotel. It happened that the float was quite deserted, and after he had helped her up with the dory, the minister stood still, dripping and embarrassed, and looked at his rescuer.

She was a tall, firm young woman, with a direct eye and a grave mouth. She might have been what is called a handsome woman, but she lacked the pliable, deferent texture so necessary in the feminine face to the taste of man. She was bareheaded, and her hair was black, and brushed back from her temples.

She, on her part, saw a well-trained clerical figure, and the face of forty-six; the minister had the mouth of an educated saint and the eyes of a natural worldling. He stood gracefully in his rubber boots, and had pushed his drenched hair back from his lined forehead.

"My name is Luther Goodspeed," he said, abruptly. "I am pastor of the Congregational church in this village."

"And I am Eunice Thorpe," returned she of the white flannel. "I am a physician, and am staying at the hotel."

The minister bowed.

"What do you suppose has become of the catboat?" he demanded, suddenly.

"Oh, she went to the bottom like a diver," replied Dr. Thorpe, smiling.

"She belonged to my senior deacon," urged the minister, plaintively. "He lent her to me to get home in. I had taken my dory over to be examined and repaired. I grazed her bows the other day. Mrs. Goodspeed was afraid of a leak."

He turned and shot a pathetic glance at the parsonage. The curtains were drawn apart in the second-story window over the piazza; figures or a figure could be seen stirring between the curtains.

"Mrs. Goodspeed did not know," pleaded the minister, not without dignity, "that I was to return in the catboat. My wife is an invalid, madam. I spare her all possible disturbance. I—I— Dr. Thorpe!" cried the man, "I have not been in a sail-boat for twenty years!"

"And with the passion of twenty men in one, he loves a tiller and a main-sheet," thought Dr. Thorpe.

For one mute minute the sea-loving woman glanced at the sea-bereft man: a straight, compassionate, womanly shaft of her brown eyes struck the sailor's heart of him.

But she spoke not as she looked—more wisely, as the world counts wisdom.

"Few men," she said, distinctly and slowly, "are so considerate. Many sick wives would recover, possessing such devotion. They need it—women; they are a pitiable lot!"

"You must understand—in your profession—" chattered the minister. He was shivering now, and for the first time conscious how wet and cold he was.

"You must go home at once," she commanded. "You are running a risk standing here. I will come over by and by and see how you are."

"Oh, pray don't!" cried the minister, with uncontrollable candor.

Now the young lady did not change color at this rebuff; and it smote him with a kind of helpless anger to see that she did not, but that she only smiled maternally.

"I will call upon you," he stammered. "I will call upon you to express my gratitude. Mrs. Goodspeed will write you a note. She will be very grateful."

"Run away home," said Dr. Thorpe, as if he had been a boy.

The Rev. Luther Goodspeed turned and went. It cannot be said that he ran. His rubber boots were still full of water, and he trod heavily across the beach and up the garden walk.

His heart was heavier than his feet. Two terrible interviews frowned before him. To face his wife or the senior deacon—which would be the crueler fate?

The minister sat in his study. It was now half past one o'clock, and all visible signs of the early parsonage dinner, abruptly and contritely eaten alone by the Rev. Luther Goodspeed, had been cleared away by Arvilla, the "house-keeper."

At the present moment the house-keeper was doing Mrs. Goodspeed's feet up in something hot and woolly. Mrs. Goodspeed moaned faintly at regular intervals, as if her suffering were a clock that must strike when it was wound. Now and then she clung to Arvilla's hand. When she was offended with her

husband she was apt to be affectionate with Arvilla.

"Only a woman can understand a woman," she sighed. "No man *can*."

"Land!" said Arvilla, dispassionately, "I wouldn't set the minister down for a minyot—not a *born* minyot. He's got some brains left in his skull yet, if you give him credit for it. You'd oughter see Mis' Chickamy's husband, where I did nursin' in Salem before I come to you. You'd think you was the wife of a cherubim, that's all."

"What did Mr. Chickamy do?" asked the invalid, with unexpected interest. "You often allude so mysteriously to Mr. Chickamy, Arvilla. But you never explain what you mean."

"Nor I ainter gointer," snapped Arvilla. "All I say is that you've married a scraphim, and you'd oughter sense it."

"Was Mrs. Chickamy as sick as I am?" asked Mrs. Goodspeed, weakly.

"A sight sicker," replied Arvilla, cruelly.

Mrs. Goodspeed made no answer. In her heart she did not think it credible that any woman could be sicker than herself. The lids drooped over her eyes. She had fine eyes, and when they were not visible her face took on a certain commonness, like a cheap candlestick in which the light has been extinguished. She had been a pretty girl; she had the petulant mouth of a spoiled invalid, but the still youthful manner of a woman beloved and sheltered.

"Has he gone over to the study?" she asked, suddenly opening her eyes. "After the shock I have received?"

"Lord!" cried Arvilla, "he's *gotter* go. He's wore out same's you be. It's considerable of a stent to be drowned, let alone fussin' over you afterwards. You was considerable to tend to for a spell along there after he capsized. My ironin's all in the basket. I ain't teched only one shimmy and two pair of his stockin's. I wish you'd perk up a little," added Arvilla, with a mournful candor.

But the invalid did not perk up. In fact, she seemed the rather to be perking down. Whatever might be said of her on some other occasions, on this Mrs. Goodspeed was really ill.

No human infliction has found less generous or even judicial comprehension,

either in life or in letters, than chronic illness. Its victims, who may sometimes receive fair play in fact, seldom do in fiction.

Nevertheless, the truth compels me to admit that Ellen Goodspeed, ten years an invalid in the seashore parsonage, and for twenty years the cherished wife of the Reverend Luther, belonged to that class of women who at their worst are what we charitably call impossible, and who when ill are never at their best.

The Rev. Luther Goodspeed sat in his church study. His next Sunday morning's sermon lay half written upon his table, held in its rebelliously fluttering place by a Concordance and the Revised Version; for the sou'wester brushed brusquely in at the large window. It was unexpectedly a stained window, having been presented by a deceased but once sympathetic parishioner, who was understood to be under special spiritual obligations to the pastor. The design presented the figure of Christ healing the sick—a cripple. The Christ was white, the cripple was yellow; a lavender Temple on a pea-green Palestine showed beyond. The window, which moved inwards and outwards on a swivel, was open, and the minister sat in the full draught, hungrily. He still panted a little, like a man who has passed through an excessive exertion of either mind or body. His boyish curls, yet wet, clung to his temples and forehead. He had a wearier expression than he was accustomed to allow himself; he wore one of the looks that a man's wife does not see. He had taken up his pen mechanically, but he was not writing. An arrow of yellow from the tallith of the Judean cripple hit the minister's idle hand. He glanced at it and his lips moved. "Poor Nelly!" he said. "Poor Nelly!" His thoughts could not get beyond this familiar stage.

The sou'wester, which was dying leisurely, suddenly set a rousing whirl of air astir in the church study and slapped the painted window. The study door opened loudly and slammed to in the draught.

"You've gotter come right over!" commanded Arvilla, shrill with unwonted excitement. "She's got *something* this time. The old doctor ain't to home, for I seen him gewhollopin' over to the

harbor. I've sot out to find somebody else. You run right along and set by her till I get one!"

The minister obeyed—everybody obeyed Arvilla. In startled silence, bareheaded, he ran from the church to the parsonage, and took the stairs two at a time. His lips still moved to the familiar "Poor Nelly!" It seemed to him to justify the experience of a thousand baseless alarms and wasted wells of sympathy drawn upon for all her ailing years that he should now find poor Nelly really very ill indeed.

In fact, she was, or seemed to be, unconscious, and lay silently in the arms that clasped her with the old, sure, indefatigable tenderness which Ellen Goodspeed took as a matter of course, and for which so many wives would have exchanged life.

Mrs. Goodspeed was not, in fact, a fainting woman, and the Reverend Luther, who might have easily taken a nurse's diploma in many or most departments, was at his wit's end, when Arvilla slammed up-stairs with the only doctor she had been able to secure.

"It ain't a he doctor," announced Arvilla, "but you better b'lieve she'll beat the old one out of his boots. *She* ain't no minyot, I betcher."

When the minister raised his haggard eyes he turned sick and dizzy. How was it possible to entrust his poor and precious Nelly to a physician in a white flannel dress and a low tortoise-shell back comb?

"*You!*" he cried, with piercing candor.

"Put her down," commanded Dr. Thorpe, authoritatively. "So,—perfectly horizontal—so. You are holding her too high."

"Is she—will she—die?" asked the husband, with white lips.

"Oh dear no," said the woman doctor.

Then, thus and there did the care of the minister's wife go over into the professional charge of Dr. Thorpe.

A new earth, if not a new heaven, now evolved in the parsonage. The invalid went captive at once and altogether to the girl doctor.

"The doctor understands my case perfectly," she confided to Arvilla.

"Shouldn't wonder!" retorted Arvilla, with an accent the invalid—who was not a dull person—felt to be ambiguous.



THE INVALID WENT CAPTIVE AT ONCE TO THE GIRL DOCTOR

"It takes a woman to understand a woman," she repeated, sharply. A flicker of carmine brushed her pale lips; she showed a pleased color not infrequently in those days.

Her naturally fine eyes assumed a deep inward brilliance. That fretful carving between her brows had cut too deep to be recalled. You can fill and level a grave, but not those moral cañons in the human face. But a gentle cheerfulness or expectancy now suffused her expression and manner.

The truth was that the minister's wife had found that which may surcharge a nervous invalid into late recovery, and for lack of which many have died—a new absorption.

"She's got an interus'," said Arvilla.

Beneath the bruising cross Mr. Goodspeed felt another shoulder—how gentle and how strong! Manifold and mysterious were the steps by which the girl doctor interlarded the parsonage life. She wove a magic web around, across, and through the cheerless household.

Every day the minister thought of her in a new metaphor. She was climate. She was atmosphere. She was escape. She was freedom. With her came uncounted respites and reliefs; through her accession opened little vistas of rest, something that he dared not call hope, and yet for which there seemed no duller name.

The exactions of the sick-room upon the overwheeled man were melting—who could say how? For three nights now he had slept undisturbed; all day he had been summoned but twice. Last week he spent a day in the city. Yesterday he had a long bicycle ride. To-day his poor Nelly herself asked him to invite his classmates from the hotel to supper.

To-morrow she thought a horseback ride somewhere would be good for him. Next week, she said, in her prettiest way—and no one had a prettier way than Nelly when she was young and well:—

"Those people at the hotel with the automobile are going to take the doctor for a trip around the Cape. They want another gentleman. If they *should* invite you—would you like to go, Luther?"

"It would not do at all for both of us to be away from you all day," replied the

Reverend Luther, promptly; but the dash of fire in his eyes betrayed him.

"I didn't know you cared so *much*," replied the invalid, not without pathos. "Arvilla can take care of me quite well. Dr. Thorpe wishes me to depend on myself. The doctor likes to have me do things without people. The doctor—Oh, what should I do without the doctor? God bless her!"

"Amen," said the minister, solemnly.

He sat in that automobile like a beatified spirit flying through the mysteries of ether.

When he came home his wife had got down-stairs. She crept up from the study sofa and came to meet him. She wore a pretty, white, loose gown; it had bright autumnal ribbons;—the doctor had given her those ribbons.

"She makes her take an interus' in how she looks," observed Arvilla.

The minister kissed his wife adoringly. In the chariot of fire, all the blazing autumn day, a comrade had shared his flight; he returned to a dependent. He thought of the girl doctor's splendid color and vigor—the look of her red cheek beneath her veil, her free step in her long automobile coat, the profile of her bare, brown hand upon her lap. He thought of his immeasurable obligations to her.

He looked at his invalid wife with fond returning eyes; her wasted face lay upon his breast; she lifted her thin hand to his cheek; she did not fret or complain; she hoped he had a good time.

These simple words filled him with admiration. He thought her heroic, and told her so.

"I'm glad you went," she answered, restlessly. "Isn't the doctor coming in?"

A vague jealousy stirred within the minister's heart. To his poor Nelly he had so long been the world and all that was therein!

He went out and sat on the porch alone when Dr. Thorpe came in to see how her patient had passed the day. The voices of the two women came to his ear confusedly—the one plaintive, appealing, and delicate; the other, ringing and strong.

They grappled some duality in his own nature, hitherto submerged in his consciousness. He had the singleness and simplicity of a devout boy. He was troubled by some of his thoughts.



Half-tone photo engraved by G. M. Lewis

SHE HOPED HE HAD A GOOD TIME

It was a cold September evening, and Dr. Thorpe came out buttoning her automobile coat. She wore her white flannel dress and a little white felt hat.

"Finished your cigar?" she said.—"Oh, I forgot!"

The minister looked so like a man who ought to have had the smoke which he denied himself that she was tempted to run across to the apothecary's and get him one.

"Poor fellow!" she said. "Is it Nelly? or the senior deacon?"

The minister returned her a straight, steady look, before which the mischief in her brown eyes wavered. In his the natural worldling and the acquired saint contended silently.

"Call it the Junior Endeavor," he replied.

"There is to be some deep-sea fishing to-morrow—the automobile party," observed Dr. Thorpe, abruptly. "Mrs. Goodspeed has suggested that you should join us. We have engaged *The Arrow*. We sail at eight o'clock."

"I!— Mrs. Goodspeed!— *The Arrow*!" ejaculated the minister. "Eight o'clock!" he added, faintly. "I carry her down-stairs at ten. Dr. Thorpe, I thank you. I cannot subject my wife to such a strain. You do not know what she suffers when I am on the water.—I told you—I have not sailed for twenty years."

"As you please," replied Dr. Thorpe, sharply; her face had its professional look. "I think it well for her to make sacrifices—to exercise self-control. You obstruct my management of the case."

"I will discuss the matter with my wife," replied the minister, stiffly. The husband and the physician parted with coldness.

He felt unhappy to have quarrelled with her. His debt to her was so large that little estrangements seemed a kind of spiritual bankruptcy.

"I shall not go on her fishing trip," he said. But the next morning he was at the wharf with the rest of the party.

As *The Arrow* dashed out of the harbor, the too long sea-denied man forgot the solid earth and all that was thereon—his senior deacon, the Junior Endeavor, parish politics—yes, and his poor Nelly. Clearly Dr. Thorpe perceived that he had

forgotten herself. She reflected that she should take pleasure in that fact.

Circumstances forced him to remember her unexpectedly. When the wind died, and *The Arrow* wallowed in the swell beyond the Light, the other lady of the party fell a victim to a severe attack of *mal de mer*—surrendered the excursion, and demanded that she be put ashore to walk home. Her husband dutifully accompanied her. Thus it befell that the minister and Dr. Thorpe returned with the skipper.

It was late September, and the bay had the glitter of its calendar. All through the morning, while the southerly lasted, the water had presented a sheet of white fire and seemed to smoke. The wind had been good-humored, sinking to the calm that had disrupted the party, and the harbor flickered with sails. Most of these had now disappeared. *The Arrow*, alone of her class, was still beyond the bar.

Her skipper, who was of the talkative, tourist's variety, had grown unnaturally silent.

"We're goin' to have a breeze o' wind," he said, slowly.

As he spoke the words, the wind veered with an incredible swiftmess, and one of the fierce autumnal northerlies, with whose temper no man may reckon, smote an unprepared and writhing sea.

The Arrow keeled and lay over as if she had been knocked down by a gun. In a moment the little pleasure-boat was quivering between whirlpool and whirlwind—her landing two miles off.

"Lend a hand, parson!" bellowed the skipper, wrestling savagely with his tiller. "If you know *anything*,—drop that mains'l, and be — quick about it!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried the minister, springing.

As the little sail came rattling down beneath his alert and intelligent fingers, he gave one glance through the smoky spray at the shore. He could make out the roof of the parsonage, and the row of stunted poplars bent like weather-beaten old men.

"You ain't no such pious fool, either!" yelled the skipper through the blast. "You dropped her quite toler'ble well."

Dr. Thorpe had not yet spoken.

"I can help too," she said, quickly.

"I understand a boat. I can steer if you'll trust me."

"When I trust my bellum to a woman," replied the skipper, "I'll be d—d, —or a parson, either."

The passengers were both as white now as the foam in which *The Arrow* weltered. The minister looked at the doctor. Her eyes answered his steadily. In them he saw an infinite and dumb anguish. If by flinging herself overboard at that moment she could have landed him alive and in the arms of his wife, she would have done it; and he felt that she would.

"*Bail!*" thundered the skipper, suddenly. "Bail like the devil, or we'll be in hell afore we can say damn!"

The northerly had now become a hurricane. *The Arrow*, trembling from stern to stern, spun and whirled like a dead leaf. The water rushed over the rail in cataracts.

Only a few people on shore had observed the position of the little boat. These gave her up for lost, with easy unanimity. Only one of them, an old offshore fisherman, with a slimy green dory, did anything.

He took his pipe out of his mouth, picked up his oars with big, gnarled, experienced hands, and rowed out into the calken.

Between whirlpool and whirlwind the three in *The Arrow*, drenched and gasping, clung to the last moments of consciousness in the silence with which most human souls face probable death. Even the skipper had ceased to damn. The minister sat with set teeth, and eyes staring shoreward and homeward.

"She asked me to take a lender," he muttered; "it was the only thing she *did* ask."

For the first time a groan ground its way through his quivering lips.

"Shut up there!" cried the skipper, roughly. "Keep up your courage, same's you sot out to. *Bail*, I tell ye! *Bail!* Look here," he added, in the next breath; "I won't fool ye no longer. 'Tain't no use . . . bailin' . . . nor nothin'.—Parson, I guess it's your turn to take the hellum."

The skipper, still wrestling with his tiller as Jacob wrestled with the angel,

jerked off his dripping hat and made as if he would fall upon his knees.

"Come, parson," he said; "you pray. It's time."

As the minister's voice, responding with the quickness of a life's training and a life's faith, rose pleading to Heaven and the hurricane, *The Arrow* quietly swamped.

At this moment the tempest yawned, and out of its throat dropped a slimy, green dory, rowed by an old fisherman, bent and drenched and dominant, son of the sea and of the storm, as powerful and as incredible as leviathan.

When the green dory landed her passengers the whirling shore was throbbing with people. Pre-eminent among them, a lanky figure against the frowning sky, Arvilla ornamented the cliff top. She was gesticulating wildly, and seemed to be shouting unheard words. The minister and the doctor looked at her in heavy silence. Neither of them had addressed the other since they were dragged out of the foam into the dory.

To her own soul Eunice Thorpe spoke the unsparing words of an ardent and high-minded woman who believes herself conscientiously to have veered to the verge of a grave mistake.

"I meant to help them! I meant to help them!" she repeated, piteously; "I have done them an irreparable hurt!"

She dared neither forecast nor ignore the probable consequences of this day's events. She felt the sense of immaturity in human experience, or aloofness from the plan of life, which comes at times to every unwedded woman.

"They are married," she thought; "I am not. I should not have interfered. I should have let them alone."

Her spirits sank so that she did not bear the drenching very vigorously, and suffered rather a serious chill. The fisherman offered her his oil coat, and the Reverend Luther tried to wrap it about her, but she declined it.

"I am no colder or wetter than you," she said. "Put it on yourself."

He dropped the coat, and it lay in the bottom of the dory; whence the skipper promptly picked it up and threw it over his own streaming back.

"Who is that?" said the minister,

abruptly, in a strained voice.—“*That?—There?*”

Her eyes followed his shaking finger.

“*It is Mrs. Goodspeed!*” she panted. “She is on the cliff. Arvilla is holding her up.”

When the dory bumped on the float, the Reverend Mr. Goodspeed leaped without looking back. Everybody made way for him as he dashed like a boy up the cliff; and a low, meaning sound came from the people on the shore when he took his wife, who had not walked a rod outside her house for well-nigh a dozen years, into his dripping arms.

Eunice Thorpe turned away. She felt exiled. She experienced the isolation of the happiest solitary woman before the mysterious bond of marriage. The hotel people took care of her, the old man doctor gallantly offered her his services, and she did not look back at the two on the cliff. She allowed herself one savage thought. “If she scolds him,” reflected the doctor, “I will—I will—put her in a plaster cast!”

But Mrs. Goodspeed did not scold her husband—not then. She kissed, and laughed, and cried, and blessed, and kissed again. With her invalid arms clasped around the half-drowned, shivering man, she walked steadily back to the personage, cooing and crooning unintelligibly all the way, as women—whether sick or well—do when they love a man or a child. And Arvilla ran on ahead to heap the fires.

The minister sat in his study. The empty church seemed muffled in more than its usual stillness. The boundings of his own heart hammered in his ears. It was a cold day, and a little fire purred in the grate. He had allowed himself this luxury, for he had coughed a good deal since *The Arrow* swamped, a week ago. His next Sunday’s sermon lay before him—thirty blank, bleak pages of manuscript paper. He had not got beyond his text, which repeated the beautiful apocalyptic dream about the “first heaven and the first earth” that were “passed away.” He could not write. The stained-glass window was shut, and the chilly autumn sun struggled to illuminate the white Christ and the yellow cripple, but made no effort to contend

with Palestine or the lavender Temple. The Rev. Luther Goodspeed had a worried look.

A low knock brushed the door, and he sprang to open it with the nervous movement of a man in unconcealed suspense. Dr. Thorpe came in without speaking, but did not take the chair which he pushed forward by the fire.

She stood with her hands upon the back of the chair, and looked—as he did—into the heart of the blaze. They began to talk at once, without ceremony or hesitation, as people do who have vital matters on hand.

“How did you leave her?”

“She’s pretty tired. Arvilla is with her.”

“What have you been saying to her?”

“Saying? Oh, everything, I think—that is, almost.”

“You play with my suspense,” he said, peremptorily. “Relieve it. It’s not natural—a physician pre-empting a wife’s confidence, while a husband is shut out.”

“You cannot be more conscious of that than I. I purpose to put an end to it as soon as possible. She has become too dependent on me. I told her so.”

“*Ah!*—That was cruel. How did she take it?”

“Like a woman—that is, with spirit. I am glad to say she showed considerable. When she was young—and well—she must have been a girl of some force of character.”

“Indeed she was!” cried the husband, hotly.

“I told her,” proceeded Dr. Thorpe, without meeting his eye, “that I intended to leave town next week. I have decided to practise in the city. I am going on Friday morning.”

“*Going? Friday morning?*—I thought you meant to settle here. There are so many who—have expected it—who wish it . . . a good many ladies of my congregation—” he broke off, lamely enough.

“Such was my intention. I have changed it,” replied the doctor, in a tone which admitted of no reprieve.

“How did she take *that*?” he asked, in a tone lower than her own.

“Like a lady—like the lady that she is.”

“It’s going to be very hard for her,”

he said, with an opaque, half-blind look. His gaze had returned to the fire.

"I am afraid so."

"She will miss you. She will not know how to take up—her sufferings—without you. Nor—nor I."

A sense of impending bereavement half strangled him. He wheeled and regarded her unexpectedly; he had the look of a troubled and bewildered boy.

"Steady, now, steady!" said Eunice Thorpe; but she said it to her own strong soul.

"I shall come back sometimes," she suggested, in a comfortable, commonplace tone. "I shall not entirely desert the case."

"Ah!—That will—help us out."

"I shall try to do—what is best," added the girl doctor, halting for the first time in this agitating interview.

Abruptly she turned and went to the study door. With her hand on the latch, she paused, drew a quick, deep breath, and faced him.

"Mr. Goodspeed, I think you ought to know that you do not know the details of my talk with your wife to-day. I have told her everything."

"Everything? I fail to—understand you, Dr. Thorpe."

Blind thoughts of things that he had read in disagreeable fiction groped for a moment through his well-ordered mind—phantoms of scenes such as did not occur in the lives of Christian clergymen; shadowy complications of feeling, such as a gentleman, being the husband of one wife, could not suffer himself to experience. But in the dark eyes of the girl doctor he saw only that inscrutable, maternal look. A little mocking smile curved her red lips as they slowly brought out these unexpected words:

"I have told Mrs. Goodspeed that she is perfectly curable. I have told her that she has been self-deluded—that she has been an unnecessary burden upon you all these years."

"It was my privilege to assume it!" cried the husband, in a scorching tone. "It was my delight as well as my duty. My wife has been a very sick woman—"

"I have just told her that such is not the fact," interrupted the doctor, calmly. "I have told her that she has put a false diagnosis on the condition. I have told

her to stay out of bed and keep on her feet—that she is perfectly able. Within limits, I mean, of course. I have ordered her to walk as far as the end of that row of round-shouldered poplars every day. She has promised to do so."

"Did you ever tell her to do this before?" gasped Luther Goodspeed.

"Never."

"Why not?"

"She would not have believed me nor obeyed me. Now she can't help herself. Since she walked to the cliff to meet you, there is nothing to be said. What you call Providence shipwrecked you to disillusionize her. No therapeutics could have done it. Love did. She will never be a strong woman, or quite well. But, relatively speaking, she will recover."

"Do you mean to say," demanded the minister, severely, "that my poor Nelly— Oh, you must have hurt her! You wounded her!—I should go to her at once."

He looked about for his hat. A shaft of the autumn sunlight struggled through the tallith of the white Christ in the window and expressed the pallor of the man's noble face. All its patient lines and conquered self were revealed, perhaps sublimated, before the doctor's steady eyes.

"You are a good man," she said, in a very low voice. "I honor you . . . above most men whom I know. I shall not deceive you about it all. She has suffered very much; she does; she must. But there has never been any lesion, nothing organic. There is a neurosis—but it is curable. I have told her—more than I shall tell you; more than she will tell you. Leave us to work it out. Leave me the management of my own case.—By the way," she added, "this bronchial irritation of yours needs attention. You have coughed ever since that first shipwreck, and two in one season have been more than your share. You are to go South for the month of March, this winter. I have told her so."

"You might have spared yourself that trouble!" cried the minister, defiantly. "When you see me ask my sick wife to spare me for a month—"

"You will not find it necessary to ask her," returned Dr. Thorpe, rather wearily. "She will propose it herself. —Don't, don't fight me so," she protested, with

sudden entreaty. "Don't, *don't* make everything so hard! I am trying to do—what is best—the best I can—for her—for you—for everybody."

She held out her firm brown hand abruptly. He bowed his face above it.

"*Victurus saluto,*" he said, brokenly. She smiled a little, wistfully, but did not reply; and so melted from the study. He stood for a moment when she had left him; the white light from the Christ in the window passed over his face and off from it, leaving a tremulous, uncertain shadow.

The minister sank into his study chair and laid his face upon his unfinished sermon. His praying lips touched the text: "*For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.*"

In the sick-room Mrs. Goodspeed sat panting in the easy chair. Her pretty, petulant face wore a startled, something like a terrified, expression.

"Arvilla," she asked, distinctly, "what did Mr. Chickamy do to Mrs. Chickamy? You never told me. I really wish you would. I never knew the family, you see, and never shall. There can be no impropriety."

"Won't you *never* tell?" demurred Arvilla.

"Never, Arvilla, never!"

"*Eny-meeny-mony-my,*

Hold my tongue or wish I may die?"

"*Eny meeny—mony my.*" echoed Mrs. Goodspeed, laughing. She was glad of a chance to laugh. Returning health had already taught her to weary of the tragic.

"Well," admitted Arvilla, sinking her voice to a hollow and unnatural whisper. "when she was so tantrigious nobody *could* stand her—Mr. Chickamy he *shook* her."

"Shook her! Shook his wife! A sick lady! An invalid wife! *Shook* her?" gasped Mrs. Goodspeed.

Arvilla nodded solemnly. "He warn't no cherubim," she said, conclusively. "Yourn is."

There was a harvest-moon that night, and Dr. Thorpe went out to row upon the harbor. She went alone. Everybody seemed superfluous to her. She drifted up and down for an hour, and then

brought her dory to the float, and came up the ladder slowly. At the top a strong hand stretched down to meet her own.

"I meant to be in time to help you with the dory," said the minister. He spoke with some embarrassment and timidity. "My wife wishes to know—*could* you come over?" he asked, with manifest hesitation.

"Is she really in need of my services?" demanded the doctor, somewhat shortly.

"I don't think so. I think it was more a social invitation—a friendly chat—all of us together. She is trying not to go to bed so early. She is trying to please you."

"Ask her to excuse me," replied Dr. Thorpe, after a moment's silence. "I am really—pretty tired. Some other time. Tell her I will come some other time.—Go home and tell her, please. I am going to sit here on the float for a while."

It occurred to him suddenly that he might stay and sit beside her in the moonlight on the swaying float—that he must do it. Then, with a grip through his heart, like a physical pain, he perceived that he must not. He did not say. I dare not: his consciousness halted this side of the words. He obeyed her in silence. He walked rapidly, without looking back, passed under the row of weather-beaten poplars, up the steps, and into the house.

The moon was blazing on the sea, and Eunice Thorpe buried her thoughts in gulfs of light. A woman may offer a man the highest service if she refrains from doing all she can for him. This she remembered. A noble idealization filled the delicate and upright soul of the minister. This she felt. The girl doctor meant to be glad that she had not suffered him to confuse the great counter-currents of experience. Gratitude and friendliness have the nature of the tide, and, like the tides, may rise to strange shores or ebb to familiar seas. She wondered why she was not happier that she had made this unselfish, unworldly man and that ailing and imperfect woman her lifelong and her loyal friends.

Pretty soon he came to the window of his wife's room and drew the shade. She could see his shadow on the shade after it was drawn.